

**"Of Authenticity and Woman: Personal
Narratives of Middle-Class Women in Modern
China"**

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Of Authenticity and Woman:¹
Personal Narratives of Middle-class Women
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The iconoclastic modernism of the May 4th was scarcely the only vision of modernity in Republican China. While the intellectual history of these alternative views has received some attention in the scholarship (Furth 1976), its social history has not. Urban, middle-class social forms in the Republic--from charitable societies to the family--were dominated by models of modernity that have been obscured by the May 4th narrative which found no place for "tradition" in its ideal of the emancipated individual. At about the same time that May 4th ideals were galvanizing a certain segment of the intelligentsia, a new, much more broadly-based type of association was emerging in urban China with ties that linked it (to a greater or lesser degree depending upon the particular association) organically to rural and popular culture. In this paper I shall discuss the construction of womens' identities within this middle-class milieu. I argue that the reconceptualization of morality and spirituality in this milieu had profound implications for the identities of women. In the second part of the paper, I focus upon the gap between the pedagogy of the leadership and the life-stories of the women themselves in one of these associations, the Daodehui or the Morality Society.

For the moment I shall call these associations modern, *redemptive* societies. Apart from the Morality Society, they include in their numbers the Dao Yuan (Society of the Way) and its partner, the Hongwanzihui or Red Swastika Society, the Tongshanshe or the Fellowship of Goodness , the Zailijiao (The

Teaching of the Abiding Principle) the Shijie Zongjiao Datonghui (Society for the Great Unity of World Religions first organized in Sichuan in 1915 as the Wushanshe), and the Yiguandao (Way of Pervading Unity), among many others. Some of these such as the Fellowship of Goodness claimed a following of 30 million in 1929 [Suemitsu 1932, 252] and the Red Swastika Society, a following of 7 to 10 million in 1937 [Takizawa 67].² While these claims are likely to be highly exaggerated, nonetheless, officials of Japanese puppet administrations believed that they commanded a much larger following than modern Chinese scholars, who looked down on them, were prepared to believe. Thus, Wing Tsit-chan who regarded them as "negative in outlook, utilitarian in purpose, and superstitious in belief" [Chan 167], cites a figure of 30,000 members (not followers) for the Red Swastika Society in 1927 [Chan 164].

To be sure, these societies were significantly different from each other--a topic for another essay--but what they have in common is a remarkable indicator of the new milieu of urban life across China. The great majority of these societies were premised upon an East versus West polarity where the West represented science and material culture and East Asian civilizations represented the hope for spiritual and moral regeneration of the world. These societies, most of which were established or

² Wing-tsit Chan writes that the Fellowship of Goodness claimed more than a thousand branches in all parts of China proper and Manchuria in 1923 [Chan 165]. Suemitsu believes that the Red Swastika had a following of 3 million in 1932 [Suemitsu 302].

flourished at the time of World War I, sought to bring peace and morality to a world devastated by war and greed by supplementing the material civilization of the West with the spiritual civilization of the East. They offered their spiritual solution in the form of a religious universalism whereby Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity all embodied the same spirit of universal spirituality. Their redemptive message drew on a rich vein of late imperial gentry syncretism (sanjiaoheyi) which first gained popularity in the late Ming period in the late 16th and 17th centuries. This movement which involved the Confucian gentry as well as Daoist and Buddhist leaders was inspired by Wang Yangming's commitment to the moral self-transformation of ordinary people and urged the extinguishing of worldly desires and engagement in moral action [Chow 1994, 21-25].

But this 20th century syncretism was mobilized to adapt to modern discourses. Organized with charters and by-laws, armed with a strong this-worldly orientation and a rhetoric of worldly redemption, these societies resembled other modern religious and morality societies all over the world. Indeed, while the red swastika of the society with that name could and should be understood in Buddhist terms, it was and should also be seen as modelled upon--an Eastern equivalent of--the Red Cross Society. [Suemitsu 354] Perhaps their participation in a modern discourse is revealed most clearly by their allegiance to that most fundamentally modern discourse: evolutionism or the linear

History of progress. Many of their arguments and propositions were framed by this discourse of evolutionary History. They argued that human evolution (jinhua) would stall and turn even more destructive if the present trend towards hedonistic materialism (exemplified by the West) was not countered by moral and spiritual regeneration [MDNJ 4:1; Takizawa 67]. Thus their spiritualism was dedicated to restoring humanity's evolution to perfection.

The pervasive nature of this symbiotic formulation of modernity in China does not need much demonstration. The KMT regime of the 1930s subscribed precisely to such a dualistic formulation and the New Life movement exemplified the urge to revitalize the material conditions of modernity through a muscular or rather, ascetic, Confucian moralism. This conception is most strikingly identified with a modernist, evolutionary framework in Chen Lifu's philosophy of a parallel material and spiritual evolutionism. Chen's parallelism also represents one of the more creative means of accomodating the nation's past in a modern future so characteristic of nationalist ideology the world over. Chen argues that the evolution of material civilization without spiritual progress inevitably leads to the enslavement of humankind by things [Chen 128]. Even while it grasps the livelihood of the people as the supreme goal, the New Life movement will inject moral qualities from the essence of Chinese civilization into this effort so that history can be propelled into civilizational perfection--Datong or the Great Unity [Chen

133].

Given the discursive affinities between many of these societies and the KMT, it is surprising to find that from 1927, the KMT outlawed and persecuted many of these societies, including the Morality Society [Otani 69, 123; Suemitsu 251, 255]. The KMT regime condemned these societies as riven by superstitions and dominated by local bullies and warlords. Central to understanding this hostility, I believe, is the way in which the KMT devised its representation of tradition to exclude popular religious practices--in part at least to excise and contain the power of religious heterodoxy. Thus, I have argued elsewhere [Duara 1995, chapter 3] that the KMT characterization of the spiritual as part of China's national essence incorporated modern, licensed religions, while it proscribed as superstition a range of religious societies from the heterodox to those it suspected of political opposition. Included among these were not only sectarian and several secret societies, but also most of the modern, redemptive societies. In keeping with their syncretist heritage, many of the religious practices of these redemptive societies were, in fact, drawn from popular culture. For instance, the popularity of the Daoyuan or the Red Swastika Society was often attributed to its practice of divination or planchette [Suemitsu 302]. Thus several of these societies drew from late imperial syncretism not only through their synthesis of different religious teachings, but also in their accomodation of popular gods and practices which made them a much more organic

part of Chinese society³. In contrast, the KMT appears to have espoused a more elitist variant of the dualistic formulation of modernity.

Apart from the East versus West or spiritual/moral versus material duality, these societies were also premised upon another duality: the outer versus the inner. Externally, these societies were committed to benevolent works or philanthropy (cishan shiye) including traditional charities such as soup kitchens and poor houses, and also modern hospitals, schools and contributions to international relief works. Thus for instance the Hongwanzihui, which had branches in Paris, London and Tokyo and had professors of Esperanto among its members, contributed substantially not only to relief works in China but also to the Tokyo earthquake and natural disasters in the Soviet Union [Suemitsu 292-305]. The Zailijiao, which claimed a membership of between 300, 000 to several million (it had 48 centers in Tianjin alone) developed drug rehabilitation centers using herbal medicines and self-cultivation techniques (zhengshen) which were said to fully cure over 200 opium addicts a year [Suemitsu 262-3]. The inner dimension of these societies' activities were focused upon producing the self-cultivating subject. Such self-cultivation (ziji xiuyang, xiushen) ranged from the exercise of a strict disciplinary regimen upon members to cultivating the habit of close moral and spiritual introspection designed to produce the self-cultivating subject as the moral citizen of the new world.

³ See Chow pp. 22-24, for late imperial syncretism.

The disciplinary regimen in some societies emphasized strict vows of abstinence from drugs, meats, and alcohol, sometimes, quasi-renunciation of the family, and in others, detailed codes of moral behaviour and bodily comportment [Suemitsu 266, 326-328; Takizawa 76-78; Chan 164-167]. Most societies combined all three.

The Space of Authenticity in Modernity

In this paper, I am centrally concerned with the production of this interior space in which the self is constituted or interpellated in Louis Althusser's terms (1971). Interpellation is the act by which the individual recognizes him or herself in the appellation pronounced by the other, as when we turn around upon hearing the policeman call out "Hey you". How do social powers authorize themselves to pronounce that name, to define that representation with which the individual is *pre-pared* to identify, or to negotiate her identification? Thus my first concern is with the manner in which a space of inviolability is created which authorizes certain powers to define a representation of the self and render it immune to challenges both from within (the self itself) and from external sources such as alternative discourses.

The inviolability of this space is secured by the symbolization of certain realms--such as the spiritual and moral, the essence of a culture, the traditions of a nation, the purity of woman--as sacred or authentic. Within this space, social power can be cloaked in the robes of a pure and inner authenticity, the sacred space of (or in) the secular and modern. While this space

exists in all societies, modern and pre-modern, it serves a rather special function in modern societies dominated by the discourse of linear, evolutionary History: the function of the unchanging in evolution. Elsewhere I have dwelt on the historical discourse that posits scientific civilization and rational self-consciousness as the telos of History [Duara 1995 chapter 1]. Paul Ricoeur suggests that the anxiety associated with the linear representation of phenomenological time--time as a succession of instants--cannot be fully overcome by historical narratives of continuity. Linear history has to develop an artifice which allows it to narrate over the succession of "nows", to negotiate or conceal the aporia between the deadness of the past and the contemporary experience of it [Ricoeur 1984:1-30; 1988:138-141]. For linear histories this artifice is the *subject* of History--the nation, race, or class. The subject enables History by being the living essence of the past, but also by simultaneously being free from the hold of the past: that which evolves is that which remains even as it changes.

Thus, the space of authenticity is often identifiable with the unchanging essence from the past that serves a necessary function as the subject of a linear History. As I see it, this unchanging essence is, of course, by no means unchanging, but neither is it a pure invention as some culture theorists might allege. It is a repeatedly re-constituted "essence" whose historicity is concealed by its pace of change which is not

synchronous with change in other spheres.⁴ In locating this sphere of authenticity within the problematic of linear History, I wish to separate it from a purely or primarily psychologistic reading of these essences and traditions. Thus while Joseph Levenson's interpretation of the re-creations and manipulations of "tradition" as psychologically comforting to modern Chinese intellectuals who needed to assert the particularity of Chinese history in the face of the overwhelming superiority of scientific civilization and values may have been true for some intellectuals at some time and place, the re-construction of tradition had other meanings and functions not reducible to salving the inferiority complex of Chinese intellectuals. All nations and societies that see themselves as subjects progressing or evolving through linear time need to constitute an "unchanging core" in order to recognize themselves in their ever-changing circumstances. Hence the role of tradition or sacred national symbols or core values in Britain or France or America. What is interesting about the Chinese and other non-western cases is that the aporia of having to be of the past and also not of it is presented as having to be both Eastern and Western. Thus there is an imbrication between Easternness, national or cultural essence,

⁴ Similarly, by "tradition" I refer not to some abiding essence or primordial inheritance, a view found both in nationalist and modernization paradigms of our times. I see it rather as a discursive production, an inheritance that is re-signified in the inheriting process--a re-presentation [See Duara 1995, ch.3]. It is precisely because the past is reproduced or co-produced by the present that there is so much diversity and contestation over tradition and that characterizations of this tradition are so changeable over time.

and the space of authenticity, each functionally different, but each authorizing the other.

Of course, the inviolable space of authenticity need not necessarily be associated with all these other functions. Thus communist ideology in China developed a space of authenticity without any help from Easternness, but it probably did need some notion of an abiding communist or nationalist essence in the march towards progress (change) that the party heralded. In a rich and fascinating essay on female images and the national myth in the PRC before 1980, Meng Yue argues that the production of such a space of interiority was necessary even for iconoclastic radicals such as the Chinese communists in order to anchor communist ideals within the individual self. She suggests that it was through the figure of the de-sexed, un-bodied woman in PRC literature--the figure of purity--that the triumph of class struggle was secured. Ideally, both men and women gained their sense of the authentic classless self through the model of the self-denying, sacrificing (for the state, according to Meng), sexless woman. "On the one hand, the state's political discourse translated itself through women into the private context of desire, love, marriage, divorce and familial relations, and on the other, it turned woman into an agent politicizing desire, love, and family relations by delimiting and repressing sexuality, self and all private emotions." [Meng 118]. Not only did such a woman enshrine all that was pure and true in communist discourse, she also symbolized that unchanging core--the

stillness of the true--whereby communism could recognize itself in the march of change.

Authenticity and the Construction of Nationalist Patriarchy

Notwithstanding the partial exception of the Communist case, the homology between the dualities of East versus West and essential versus evolving was characteristic of much non-western modern thought in the first half of the 20th century, and typically authorized the space of authenticity in several Asian societies of the time. Partha Chatterjee's work on the colonized middle-class in Bengal, which has greatly aided my own explorations of the space of authenticity, shows us how nationalist ideology in late 19th century India appropriated the middle-class production of a sphere that he calls the inner domain of sovereignty of nationalist ideology. Like so much Chinese nationalism discussed above, Indian nationalism was built upon a duality of the scientific and material versus the spiritual and cultural. Thus while the Indian nation had much to learn from the material and scientific civilization of the West, in spiritual matters, India had the upper hand and a contribution to make to world civilization [Chatterjee esp. ch. 6].

Chatterjee's particular contribution is to show how this dualism was organized in a way to create an inner realm of national life that could not be contested by the colonial power. 19th century Bengali middle class intellectuals had re-worked certain historical texts to define the ideal "woman" and distinguish her from depictions of the "traditional" (ie. recent

historical, rather than the quintessential) Bengali women, from depictions of contemporary lower-class women, and from the figure of the Western, materialist, and masculinized woman. Modern Indian nationalism found this trope of the enlightened but quintessentially "traditional" woman to be highly congenial and appropriated it as the core of the essential nation. Tradition thus came to mark a realm of inner sovereignty that was simultaneously demarcated as domestic, spiritual and feminine. The Hindu nationalist representation of woman--educated and educating, but personifying the spiritual virtues of domesticity--gave body to this national essence. While on the one hand, this lofty idealization of the Hindu woman provided new aspirations for some women, it also represented a new nationalist patriarchy and produced a sense of betrayal for women whose real lives could not match this idealization [Chatterjee chs. 6-7].

The creation of an inner realm in the modern discourses of Republican China was important in authorizing a space that was off-limits, less to colonial powers than to westernizing forces within China--most significantly the social forces spawned by the May 4th movement. It is hardly a coincidence that many of these redemptive modern societies emerged in the last years of 1910s or in the early 1920s and Sun Yat-sen's valorization of Chinese traditional virtues within nationalist rhetoric took place at around the same time as the May 4th movement. As a result, two very different nationalistic representations of women emerged in China. On the one hand, there was the May 4th representation of

the radically anti-Confucian, indeed, anti-familial, nationalist woman, and on the other, the varieties of more conservative constructions of woman as the soul of tradition-within-modernity with which we are concerned here. These two conflicting representations of women yielded a great deal of violence in the 1920s and 1930s--especially after the split between the KMT and CCP in 1927--when thousands of "modern" women were killed by the KMT forces because they were accused of "free love", or sometimes simply because they had bobbed hair, unbound feet, or a local reputation for opposing familial authority [Diamond 6-7]. While they were surely killed because they were marked by these signs as communist (whether or not they were), the causal logic worked in both directions. Communism itself was illegitimate significantly because such women and their behaviour despoiled the innermost purity of Chinese culture.

Nationalists and social reformers brought women into the modern world by establishing a new nationalist patriarchy. From its inception at the end of the 19th century, modern Chinese nationalism linked the liberation of women to the cause of national strength. Abolition of footbinding, women's education, the need for pre-natal care, became major issues in the reform movement of the late 19th century led by Kang Youwei and his colleagues, because, as Kazuko Ono writes, these issues became "linked to the nation's survival or demise, its strength or weakness, through the education of children" [Ono 27]. While there were some notable efforts by women writers themselves to

dissociate women's liberation from the national cause [See for instance Li and Zhang 1975: esp. 463-7], through the early decades of the 20th century the legitimacy of the former continued to remain dependent on the latter. The republican nationalist patriarchy developed by colonizing or transferring to itself certain ideals of womanly virtue from historical patriarchies. Even as this nationalism was authenticated, or rather authenticized, by traditional virtues, these virtues were simultaneously infused with values from the discourses of modern nationalism. Women were to participate as modern citizens in the public sphere of the nation, but they were also expected to personify the essence of the national tradition.

Consider a lecture by the leading KMT nationalist Wang Jingwei in a girls' school in 1924: Wang observes that the conflict between the old and the new in society can be seen as the clash between the school which is the nucleus of the new thought and the family which preserves the old ways. He urges that in order for China to progress in this competitive world of nation-states, it is important for students to take control over society and reform its evil customs. He recognizes that it is easy for them to succumb to the control of the family and be assimilated into society, but he implores them not to take this path. He suggests that it is particularly important for girls' schools to nourish a spirit of social reform among their students since in their present state they stand as obstacles to national progress [Wang 106-7].

Having framed his talk within the evolutionary discourse of modernity, Wang's second theme is about the importance of choosing the right kind of education. He suggests that although Chinese traditions have a lot that is bad, it has one strength: the cultivation of a long tradition of self-sacrifice (xisheng) among females, whether in their natal home where they willingly sacrificed their happiness for the sake of their parents, or for the sake of their husbands after marriage, or for the sake of their sons in old age. Doubtless, the old society often used this blind self-sacrifice to bury their freedom. But women should know that the responsibility of the individual is heavy and should not be exploited (liyong) by society. If they then sacrifice themselves out of true conviction (zhengzhende qinggan), then such conduct is proper, and, indeed, highly admirable. This spirit of self-sacrifice actually forms the indispensable basis of all morality--Confucian, Buddhist and Christian. "Chinese women are rich in the spirit of self-sacrifice. If we can properly direct this spirit towards ...[the collectivity] and use it, then we can on the one hand, perhaps preserve a little of the essence (jingsui) of the teachings of several thousand years, and on the other, still plant the roots of modern liberatory thought. In seeking education for girls I hope we can uphold our mission to inherit the past to enlighten posterity [chengxian qihou]" [Wang 108]. Thus Wang identifies woman as the locus of unchanging authenticity not by sanctifying the home and domesticity--as in India--but by redirecting the virtue of self-sacrifice to the

nation. This new patriarchy demands a non-physical and non-materialist woman as the symbol of national essence.

Re-reading Nationalist Narratives

Nationalist patriarchy *came into being* by appropriating the categories of traditional patriarchy in service of the nation. But the new discourses of nationalism permitted a re-reading of these categories. A 1903 essay on the future of Chinese women written by a "certain southern woman" appears to accept the historical pieties and clichés about women. She declares that there are three special qualities of Chinese women that will allow them to surpass the women of Europe and America. Women have the heart of steadfastness (jianzhi xin), the heart of benevolence (ciai xin), and the heart of vindictiveness (baofu xin). As in Wang's speech above, she recounts the constancy with which women give their love as filial daughters and chaste wives despite the severe restraints of a patriarchal ideology. If only women were enlightened about the value of the nation, they could transfer this steadfast love and undying loyalty to the nation. Similarly, if with their heart of benevolence and compassion, women could achieve education and participate equally in public affairs, then the nation would certainly have equality, public harmony, and love of the race, which China so utterly lacks. Finally, the label of women as vindictive is turned to national advantage. Although it is said that a woman's heart is most poisonous, the southern woman regards it as women's exceptional virtue (te meixing). The Chinese people lack a sense of hatred

for, and can even collaborate with, their conquerors. But once women can learn about the brutality of the alien Manchus, their thirst for revenge will strengthen their hatred and cause them to devise plans to oppose them [Chu'nan nuzi 394-5].

On a first reading the text does all that we have suggested above. Nationalist discourse, at least in this early stage, appears with a highly patriarchal face that reproduces all the stereotypes of the historical discourses of women. And it seems to be all the more bizarre coming as it does from a woman writer. But a closer reading reveals that the southern woman is engaging in a strategic re-reading of nationalism in order to empower women. Each of the categories she discusses has been a means of subject-ing women, not only in the sense of subordinating them, but also by giving them the only categories to think their subjectivity or agency. But nationalism gives her a new discursive context through which to re-value these categories. By investing them with unexpected power, both constructive and destructive, she not only seeks to empower women, but potentially gives them far greater agency in the nation-building project than men who are neither steadfast, compassionate, public-minded, nor patriotic. Second, running through the text is the plea that these conditions can only be achieved if women receive education. The southern woman recognizes that this is an age of opportunity for women which must not be missed. There are even enlightened men who advocate the education of women. "Although they may not truly mean what they say, yet our generation can seize their

words (jie bi koutouchan zhi li), and implement our real agenda." [Chu'nan nuzi 395] While doubtless the cause of women has been subordinated to national greatness via the language of tradition, I nonetheless find this to be an intriguing piece. When one only has the language of the other to speak the self, one can gain agency only by the subversive use of this language.

Lu Xun's story "Soap" (1924) brings home to us with biting clarity the different meanings that this trope of traditional woman in the modern era signified for men and women in Republican China. Simin has bought a cake of foreign, scented soap for his wife. His wife is pleased but also embarrassed by the coded message for her to make herself cleaner and more alluring. When Simin had wanted to open the soap packaging at the store to check its quality, he was taunted by some schoolgirls with bobbed hair by a foreign word he does not understand (it turns out to be "old fool"). Highly agitated, he now orders his school-going son to check its meaning and begins to rave and rant about the moral havoc that the new schools are playing on China, especially the schools for girls. He says, "Just think it is already in very poor taste the way women wander up and down the streets, and now they want to cut their hair as well. Nothing disgusts me as much as these short-haired schoolgirls. What I say is: There is some excuse for soldiers and bandits, but these girls are the ones who turn everything upside down. They ought to be very severely dealt with indeed..." [Lu 1924, 193; Lu 1960, 167].

Simin then goes on to contrast this behaviour with that of a

filial beggar girl of eighteen or nineteen begging outside a store who turned over all the money she received to her blind grandmother. The crowds that gathered to watch the two not only did not give much money, but made jeering remarks about how she would not be bad at all if one scrubbed her up with two cakes of soap. Simin sees this as evidence of the catastrophic decline of morality in modern China. Later at dinner, when Simin's wife can no longer take Simin's irritability through the evening, she hints that he secretly harbors sexual longing for the beggar girl which he tries to cover up by exalting her filial and self-sacrificing conduct. In utter frustration, she exclaims, "If you buy her another cake and give her a good scrubbing, then worship her, the whole world will be at peace" [Lu 1924, 199; Lu 1960, 171]. Later, she adds, "We women are much better than you men. If you men are not cursing eighteen or nineteen-year-old girl students, you are praising eighteen or nineteen-year-old girl beggars: such dirty minds you have..." [Lu 1924, 200; Lu 1960, 171]

At this moment, Simin is rescued from this tirade by the arrival of some friends who have come to remind him about the urgent need to publicize the title of the essay and poetry contest for their Moral Reform Literary Society (Yifeng Wenshe). The title of the essay had already been drafted as "To beg the President to issue an order for the promotion of the Confucian classics and the worship of the mother of Mencius, in order to revive this moribund world and preserve our national character".

Thinking about the beggar woman, Simin suggests that poem should be titled the "Filial Daughter" to eulogize her and criticize society. In the following exchange one of his friends laughs uproariously upon hearing the jeering comments about giving her a good scrubbing. Simin is acutely pained by his friend's laughter, because as Lu Xun hints, it suggests to him the truth of his wife's words that he has repressed.

The story encapsulates the themes of my paper aptly.⁵ Lu Xun sets up the duality between Chinese and foreign, East and West, old and new as the basic framework of the story. The foreign and new--schoolgirls, bobbed-hair, modern education, English words, the heavy sound of leather shoes worn by Simin's son--are an intrusive and disruptive presence for Simin. Even foreign soap, with its scented power to arouse desire, disturbs, confuses and agitates him. Indeed, it is clear that what he finds most disturbing is the unmooring of gender and sexual norms. He responds not only with the vituperative rhetoric against the need for girls to go to school, but with the valorization of the conduct of the pure and filial beggar-women. For Simin she represents everything that is pure in tradition and he wants the poetry contest to enshrine her purity. Yet this is a

⁵ I wish to acknowledge my debt to Carolyn Brown's reading of this story, particularly her interpretation of woman in the story as trope and as realist figure. "Lu Xun's view of women can best be described as androgynous; women's moral insight, like that of the dispossessed, derives from seeing society from the underside. He demythologizes gender codes, revealing their attempt to deflect attention from issues of power by substituting issues of sexuality. In this his insights resonate with the most contemporary of feminist theorists [Brown, 77]."

representation that has to exalt her poverty (filial even in desperate need) and de-sexualize her as the object of men's (especially his) desire. Just as much as the rhetoric against girls schools, this is a strategy of containment.

Simin and his friends of the Moral Reform Literary Society closely resemble some of the men we will discuss in the Morality Society. Like the latter, the former would have been quite happy to contain girls within special righteous schools and although the latter could have more complex views than the men in Lu Xun's satire, they too sought to contain women as the essence of tradition-in-modernity. But as Carolyn Brown points out, the one person in Lu Xun's story who was able to see through this trope of woman was none other than the only woman unrepresented by the male characters--Simin's wife. She writes, "with the character Mrs SSumin, he (Lu) empowers a semi-traditional woman with speech and the capacity to 're-read the male text,' making her the locus of his own value" [Brown 77]. It is to these latter two themes: the constitution, or rather, objectification of woman as subject in the Morality Society, and the enunciation of this subject position by women themselves--the 're-reading of the male text'--which I shall turn in the remaining pages.

The Morality Society and the New Patriarchy

I shall examine here the views of the Morality Society (Daodehui) about women and the narratives of its women lecturers during the early 1930s under the Japanese puppet state of Manzhouguo. The society was founded in Shandong in 1918 and Kang

Youwei served as its President in the 1920s until he died in 1928 [MDNJ 1:1]. The society had a strong syncretic religious character through much of the 1920s (presumably when Kang was alive), but the religious component seemed to have waned by the 1930s when its focus on morality and charity gained salience. Nonetheless, in identifying its source of moral inspiration, a leader of the society, Wang Fengyi, suggested that all three historical religions in China pointed to the permanence of the moral: thus Confucius said that without righteousness, wealth and nobility were like passing clouds; Buddhism, that that which has form must die; Daoism, that only good and evil are without form and so have a long existence. Thus morality persists and gives meaning to the universe, and it is the morality of the East that will save the universe from the materialism and destructiveness of the West [ORMS Part 3:1].⁶

The Morality Society flourished in Manzhouguo because of state support and patronage of its activities and those of similar organizations. In 1932, the Manzhouguo branch of the Morality Society cut off ties with its headquarters in Beijing and came under the supervision of the Manzhouguo government. Although it is hardly possible to characterize the attitude of this society as an expression of *nationalist* patriarchy since it operated under a puppet regime, many of these modern redemptive

⁶ While expressing his admiration of Wang Yangming's advocacy of the truth of the three religions, Wang Fengyi also ridiculed Sun Yatsen who declared the priority of knowledge over action whereas Wang believed in combining morality with action [ORMS 3:1].

societies in Manzhouguo developed a space of authenticity from the same sources as did KMT nationalism or the kind of conservative middle class ideology that Lu Xun satirized. While nationalists sought to preserve a *national* essence in the evolutionary process, the Morality Society sought to preserve an East Asian essence while acknowledging the necessity of material evolution [MDNJ 1:1; 4:1-2].⁷

At the time the Morality Society encountered the Manzhouguo regime there was a remarkable convergence of ideological interests between it and certain currents in Japan. Similar "redemptive" societies in Japan, such as the Shibunkai, offering Confucianism and Shinto as the spiritual alternative to excessive materialism and individualism had begun to grow in strength from the 1920s, particularly as economic conditions worsened and social unrest grew. Asiatic moral systems emphasizing ethical responsibilities were celebrated as alternatives to capitalism and Marxism, both Western doctrines (Smith 123-6). By the 1930s, the redemptive rhetoric of elite Confucian societies and the right wing nationalist and militarists not only began to come together but were also assimilated in an active political and

⁷ Although we do not think of Manzhouguo as a nation-state, it did, in fact, possess a highly developed rhetoric of a new type of nation unifying the different races of the area (xiehe guojia). However, since its rhetoric had to balance the assertion of national independence with its political dependence upon Japan, the nation was only one of the "ultimate" communities that it emphasized; the other was East Asia.

educational program by the Japanese government (Smith 154-166).⁸

Thus it was that Manzhouguo state, the real power behind which was the Japanese military, had at its disposal an ideology and language with which to forge an alliance with the redemptive societies in northeast China. Like the KMT government in Nanjing, the Manzhouguo government censured the "superstitious" character of the redemptive societies, but instead of seeking to eradicate the societies themselves, it saw in them the potential for their transformation into state-controlled civic organizations [Takizawa 82-86, 100-102]. In this new political framework, the Morality Society became what in Japanese was called a kyoka (jiaohua in Chinese) organization--an agency engaged in welfare and enlightenment of the people (see also Gluck 103 and Garon). Indeed the transition from a more religious orientation to morality and charity in this Society is probably attributable to its closer supervision by the state.⁹

The Morality Society was perhaps the most elite Chinese organization among all such societies in Manzhouguo. Its

⁸ To be sure this was a synthetic rhetoric that not only sought to combine Eastern spirituality with Western civilization, but also Confucianism with native Japanese traditions. Japan was, especially after the Chinese Republican revolution, depicted as the true leader and champion of Confucianism and Eastern morality--a depiction which justified intervention in China (Smith 145).

⁹ The story of the tensions between the Society and the Manzhouguo government over religious worship, account-keeping, school curricula, ties with secret societies, as well as ideological clashes with progressive groups within Manzhouguo, is a very revealing one and belongs to another history [MDNJ 2:14-16, 25-35, 42-45].

membership and office-holders boasted top officials, merchants, and landowners at all levels of Manzhouguo society from the major cities to the subcounty townships. The message of peace, morality and spiritual salvation of the world by the East befitted these successors of the old gentry elite. As a jiaohua agency it revealed a strong propagandist urge. It put great stock by its cadres or activists (shi) who were characterized as benevolent and resolute [MDNJ 4:2]. Through their activities in schools, in lectures, in spreading baihua commentaries of classical morality, in establishing popular enlightenment societies to "reform popular customs and rectify the people's minds and hearts" the society propounded a strong rhetoric of reaching out to all--the rich and poor, men and women [MDNJ 2:36-42; 4:117, 118; 8:22-23]. By 1934, the 312 branches of the Manzhouguo society operated 235 "righteous" or "virtuous" schools, 226 lecture halls, and 124 clinics [MDNJ 1:21].

The records of this society allow us to see how it evolved historically from the gentry culture of the late empire. In the biographies of model figures honored in the 1930s for their virtuous and moral actions frequently undertaken in the 1900s and 1910s before the society was founded [ORMS 1:10-58], filiality and loyalty are often cited. But the bulk of such honors are granted to men and women who established, managed or contributed money for "virtuous and chaste girls' schools" (zhennu yixue; baonu yixueyuan). Moreover, while the biographies of model individuals traceable in these records to the late 19th century

indicate that temple building and repairs were common activities in the last years of the 19th century, by the Republican period, establishing these schools may have become a more common virtuous activity than contributions to building temples or arches to chaste widows. Doubtless, the emphasis upon virtuous girls' schools developed with the spread of the female education in public institutions. We have seen an example of this anxiety in Lu Xun's story and the pages of the journal Funu Zazhi in the early 1920s are filled with essays about the problem of having boys and girls in the same class (Yan 1923; Wang 1918; Kang 1918). Virtuous girls' schools represented a core institutional means to manage a generalized anxiety about the loosening of morals and fundamental values, an anxiety that became increasingly focused upon the bodies of females. Thus, one woman claimed that she only really understood what it meant to read after her father transferred her from a regular school to a virtuous school. Learning to read was not a true learning unless such a reading could shape the body and its conduct (xing dao shenshang, na jiao shizi) [ORMS 4:142].

The 20th century discourse of female virtue found here is clearly continuous with the cult of chaste widows and virtuous wives (Elvin, Furth, Ko, Chow). The establishment of the virtuous schools is couched in the language of this tradition: model men and women who have established virtuous schools have been inspired by chaste women's biographies in the lienuzhuan as well as by the personal examples of chaste widows and virgins in the

family. But inevitably, there was also a shift in the meaning of female virtue. Just as nationalist patriarchy in the KMT reorganized the role and meaning of the ideal women, so too, in the Morality Society, as the figure of woman pervaded the space of authenticity, it became the site for reconstructing tradition.

Among the records of the society, the Oral Records of Morality Seminars of the Third Manzhouguo Morality Society [ORMS] held in 1936 in Xinjing (Changchun), is an extraordinarily revealing text of over 300 pages of personal narratives and testimonials of the leaders and teachers of the society who taught in its righteous schools and went around the country giving lectures on morality. The bulk of these narratives are organized around five categories drawn from the classical tradition: zhiming (to know your fate), zhixing (to know your nature), jinxin (to devote your heart and mind, to devote oneself), lishen (to establish your self or body); in turn lishen is divided into lizhi (to resolve your will), and liye (to fulfill an enterprise or profession), and finally, zhizhi, (to know your limits).¹⁰ Participants in the seminar made presentations about how their lives were guided by the appropriate morality within each of these categories. We hear the life stories of about 25 women and an equal number of men, although the total number of speaking men was greater because of

¹⁰ The Hanyu Da Cidian quotes passages from the representative texts in which these categories occur: the first can be found in the Yijing, the second and third in the Mengzi, the fourth in the Xiaojing, lizhi in the Hou Hanshu, liye in the Hanji, and zhizhi in the Liji.

the many introductory speeches made by Manzhouguo civil and military officials. From the speeches and narratives of both the men and the women, I shall try to construct an image of how woman is constituted as a subject. From the personal narratives of the women I will try to demonstrate the gap between the constituted subject and the enunciating subject. The enunciating subject seeks to negotiate this gap in a variety of ways even as she derives meaning and spiritual sustenance--identity--from the constituting ideology or pedagogy.¹¹

The introductory lectures by officials inevitably stressed the mediating role of the Society between the state and the family. The Manzhouguo police were closely associated with the project for moral renewal of the citizenry. The head of the Capital Police Bureau declared that in order to attain national goals and renew the people, it was first necessary to cleanse the people's hearts. While this was the indirect responsibility of the nation-state, it was more directly the responsibility of such agencies as the Morality Society. Such societies should bond the people to the state (guanmin yizhi) by nourishing ethical attitudes and duties towards the family, towards society, and towards the nation [ORMS 3:4-5, 38]. Employing an orthodox Confucian rhetoric, these officials repeatedly emphasized the

¹¹ See Homi Bhabha on enunciation: "The reason a cultural text or system of meaning cannot be sufficient unto itself is that the act of cultural enunciation - the place of utterance - is crossed by the difference of writing...It is this difference in the process of language that is crucial to the production of meaning and ensures, at the same time, that meaning is never simply mimetic or transparent [Bhabha 36]."

central importance of the five ethical relationships in constructing a chain of loyalty to the state.¹² This is how Tachibana Shiraaki formulated the logic: "Morality is the basis of belief, whereas superstition has no basis in morality. The youth at home must believe in the elders, the wife in the husband, and the husband in the wife. If there is no harmony within the family, then there will be no harmony in society and no harmony in the nation. The Morality Society thus represents the progress (jinbu) of morality" [MDNJ 11:29].

The goals of the nation-state could only be fulfilled when the family was strong, when husbands were righteous, and wives obedient. Within the family, the ideal moral roles for men and women were very different. Masculine virtue emphasized loyalty, incorruptibility, bravery and self-restraint. On several occasions in their narratives, men recounted as virtue the self-control by which they restrained the urge to beat their wives. One of them indicated that in showing restraint he was expressing his filiality because both his marriages had been arranged by his mother [ORMS 4:221-223]. Director Feng (Feng juren) was once faced with a serious moral crisis when his youngest wife threw his baby son on the floor: seized by a desire to avenge his progeny, he was about to strike her when he recognized the virtue of self-restraint [ORMS 4:97]. Female virtue often entailed

¹² Three of these relationships--between father and son, older and younger brothers, husband and wife--concern stabilizing family ties, the fourth relationship between friends connects horizontally across families, and the fifth between subject and monarch links the family to the state.

following the three obediences (sancong). The locus classicus of this doctrine is the Book of Rituals, (Yili Sangfuzhuan) which writes that a woman should obey her father before marriage, her husband upon marriage, and her son upon the husband's death. But in the pedagogy of the Society, as we shall see, obedience on the part of women did not necessarily entail confinement to the household. It was more that the ideal woman was shaped (or regulated) by the virtues of the family and by the reproduction of these virtues in the righteous schools and the Morality Society itself.

It was thus in the representation of the family, and the special role of women within it as repositories of the essence of (all that was good in) tradition, that the new middle-class patriarchy made common cause with the Manzhouguo state. Woman became the upholder of the "new family" which was the basis of citizenship.¹³ The new family was morally pure, selfless, and committed to moral regeneration of the world by adhering to the "kingly way" (wangdao) [ORMS 4:134]. Thus weddings were to be frugal and unostentatious since the goal was to achieve love and righteousness among the couple [MDNJ 10:6, 12:24]. Women (and to a lesser extent, men) were encouraged to rid themselves of jewelry and other accoutrements so that they could come to know their inner selves [ORMS 4:151]. The Morality Society not only

¹³ It is interesting to explore the extent to which this discourse on family and the nation-state in Manzhouguo, especially before 1941, paralleled or was influenced by other mid-century nationalist and fascist discourses in Europe and Asia.

conducted lectures and ran schools, it also organized many "family research groups" (jiating yanjiushe) in which the role of model wives and mothers were investigated. It is from these research societies that the righteous girls' schools received the necessary knowledge to improve womens' service to the family and nation without having to leave the home [MDNJ 2:41; 4:27].¹⁴

The pedagogy of the Morality Society by no means merely reproduced the historical image of the ideal Confucian woman-- whatever that may have been. It involved a representation of woman that was neither abject nor liberated in the sense of the "Western woman". Wang Fengyi, the director of the Moral Culture Department of the Manzhouguo government and an inspirational leader of the society from its inception, reported a conversation with a Christian pastor in which Wang reveals the inadequacy of historical religions. Wang declared that he believed in all religions since they all pointed to the same Way (dao), but he protested that these religions neglected or demeaned women in the education of the Way. He insisted that women should be educated and independent (liye) so that they could understand the Way [ORMS 4:207].¹⁵ Thus women's education was necessary both from

¹⁴ Thus, the weekly curriculum of the virtuous girls' schools was standardized to devote 2 hours for self-cultivation, 3 hours for the study of the classics, 5 hours for art, needlework, and music, 8 hours for Chinese, 2 hours for Japanese, 2 for history, 2 for geography, 6 for math, and 2 hours for nature study [MDNJ 2:1-3].

¹⁵ Note however, that Mr. Wang's household was probably very patriarchal. When his daughter-in-law was brought in marriage into their home, she fell into a depression and returned to her uncle's home. Mr. Wang claims that after he spoke to her, she

the state's perspective of improving the family and home and from the Society's perspective of having them understand morality. The reconstructed tradition here mobilized an image of woman that redefined her in accordance with modern discourse even while claiming a pristine traditionalism/East Asianism at the heart of the culture- and nation-building project.

Women as Enunciating Subjects

Who were the women who joined these societies, particularly as lecturers? As lecturers, they must, at some level have believed in the pedagogy. Like teachers everywhere, they expressed demoralization when few attended their lectures and were gratified by a large turn-out. Many of them were women with much grief in their lives. There were those whose children had died young, those locked in loveless marriages, those who sought solace because a younger wife or concubine has been brought in to replace them, younger wives bullied by older wives and in-laws, and many others. Many were devout Buddhists and found the society to be basically compatible with their Buddhist faith. These were women for whom the Morality Society offered a rationalization or justification of their fate, a means of coping with their difficult lives and, and often, spiritual solace. A woman named Tu declares that hers is the fate (ming) of a stepmother. Neither the old nor the children treated her well no matter how hard she tried. But she has now come to understand her fate and has resolved her will (lizhi). Whereas earlier she had been addicted

happily returned to their home [ORMS 4:157].

to drugs, now she is a vegetarian and feels no need for drugs. Indeed, she has acquired such strength and influence in her household that no one in her household takes drugs [ORMS 4:90]. A Mrs. Zhao states simply that earlier she would be sad when people called her "wife number two" (er taitai). Now she has learnt to live with her fate (tianming) and she is happy [ORMS 4:94]. Mrs. Liu's in-laws got a "little sister" (a concubine) for her who was filial and sisterly and so she had to learn to be a good elder sister. She decided to make up to her in-laws and husband by performing service to society which she has done for the past ten years [ORMS 4:138].

But resignation, coping and solace from grief and mistreatment were not the only meanings that women derived from their participation in the Morality Society. These narratives also reveal various strategies whereby women were able to maneuver the goals of the society to secure advantage for themselves and for other women. This was hardly easy because many women must have experienced the interpellative or constituting activity as a form of objectification. Counter-representations of the modern, westernized woman were readily available to these women. Newspapers in Manzhouguo debated the issue of women's liberation, and until 1941, at least, often carried positive images of the liberated, Western and Westernized women. Indeed, it was the often unacknowledged irruption of elements of this discourse of the liberated woman into their own that enabled some of their maneuvers. Yet it is also clear that they accepted the

virtue of filiality and even obedience to patriarchs. Most of all, they appeared to derive their inspiration and strength from the spirit of devotion and self-sacrifice--from that space of authenticity carved out by the pedagogy of the society. For us, the challenge is to see how they could be true to their subjectivity inscribed by the Morality Society while recovering some agency as enunciating subjects.

The first and perhaps most important difference between the discourse of these redemptive societies and the historical, Confucian or patrilineal discourse on women (see Furth 1990, Chow, Elvin) was that the rhetoric of confining women to the home in these societies was balanced or countered by a valorization of public or social service. Not only did these societies have an ideology of public service, they were themselves part of the public sphere. As such, women who participated in them as members, as audience or as lecturers were *ipso facto* involved in activities outside the home. Recall, even in the official articulations of the duty of the society to create a nested hierarchy of moral obligation linking the individual to the state, the family was not directly linked to the state. This relationship was mediated by the need to fulfill a moral obligation to society. The realm of society or shehui as a positively evaluated sphere of human--male and female--interaction represented a significant, though not necessarily recognized, departure from earlier historical discourses containing women within the domestic sphere (Furth). Mrs. Zhao

was one who did recognize the significant difference: "Those of you under the age of forty have had the benefit of a modern education and may work outside of the home. Those of us over forty are barely literate and we know little about affairs outside the home. Now this (Morality) society allows us to exchange knowledge: I can go to your home and you to mine; we are not restricted by being rich or poor...From this it is clear that the future of women is bright. We can come and hear lectures everyday; we can obtain morality: the young can be filial to the old and the old can be kind. I hope my sisters will strive to build the future" [MDNJ 11:30].

The realm of the social, however, was emerging as an arena of ambiguity and undeclared constestation. Even in Mrs. Zhao's comments which reveal a deeply felt sense of liberation, moral development afforded by the emergence of the social was ultimately brought to bear to restore filiality. While many of the men acknowledged the importance of service to society, they believed that confining women, though not necessarily to the home, was the best possible way for society to develop. Just as the virtuous girls' school was the way to regulate the behaviour of girls who were exposed to society, so too, for some of these men, women's participation in the Morality Society was itself an ideal way to control their activities outside the home. The director of the society, Mr. Feng, had four wives all of who, he claimed, were happily involved with the Morality Society and regularly ketou (kowitz) to its teachers [ORMS 4:53]. Not

everybody in the Society accepted this pattern of containment. Indeed, even among the leadership we have noted Mr. Wang's espousal of the necessity of women's education and independence. Girls and women sometimes reacted collectively to these efforts at containment. The investigator of a survey of social welfare organizations in Manzhouguo, reported an episode from one of the virtuous schools that he witnessed in 1937 in Liaoyuan county.

The investigator, Takizawa Toshihiro, reported that the school and its dormitories were basically well-maintained. It derived its income from a wool-weaving workshop and a grain store. It had separate lecture halls for women citizens (funu shimin) appointed with a picture of the emperor Puyi and an altar to Confucius. On one of the days he was there, a vigorous discussion on the subject of "the spirit of nation-building and women in the family" (jianquo jingshen he jiating funu) followed a lecture delivered by a lecturer from Fengtian (Shenyang). Takizawa was impressed by the dedication of the students and teachers of the school to popular enlightenment and the way in which they criticized the old-fashioned attitude of the lecturer. Takizawa recommended that rather than preach homilies to these children, the Society should emphasize the teaching of practical life skills. In this way, they would learn from the scientification (kagakuka) of everyday life [Takizawa 94-95].

Such collective reactions to the discursive and institutional efforts to channel women's behaviour are less visible in the personal narratives. Nonetheless, the positive

evaluation of the realm of the social or public in modern ideologies together with the ambivalence of the leaders (contrast Feng's behaviour with Wang's comment on religions denying women), created opportunities which these women seized and utilized to the fullest extent.¹⁶ A Mrs. Bai decided to give up the life of the inner quarters because she realized that the world of women was a very grasping one in which one could not be ethical. By giving lectures in society, she could make a living which permitted her to support both her mother and mother-in-law. Thus she could be filial and moral without being dependent upon anyone, neither husband nor children [ORMS 4:185]. A recently married woman accepted the foreordained nature of the daughter-in-law to be like water: to serve all in the family with devotion--to be filial to her in-laws, help her husband attain a Buddhist nation, be kind to her children--and rid herself of vain desire. At the same time, women could follow the men and devote themselves to social good. Indeed, once one had satisfactorily served the in-laws, it was incumbent in the next phase to serve the world [ORMS 4: 134-135].

Mrs. Chen reveals the significance of public service and the independence that it can bring to women. She emphasizes the utility and value of women in the family and the importance of these qualities in purifying the world and resolving to do good

¹⁶ In some ways, the realm of the social functioned like the "nation" as a legitimating force in providing alternative roles for women. As the sphere of collective activity it was certainly a most important component or building block of nationalist discourse.

for society. She begins her narrative with an account of how her father-in-law brought her into the household because the education she received from her mother would bring good values into their home. These were the qualities that permitted lishen, the ability to establish oneself. In earlier periods, lishen, to the extent that it referred to women, referred to feminine bodily comportment within the domestic sphere. In a booklet of moral instructions for women that circulated in the late imperial period, lishen is described as a "way of being tranquil (qing) and chaste (zhen). Tranquillity brings purity (jie) and chastity brings honor (rong). While walking do not turn back your head; while speaking do not expose your teeth; while sitting, do not move your knees; while standing, do not raise your voice.....When of necessity you have to go out, be sure to veil your face..... Only when you establish your body in such proper and upright ways (lishen duanzheng) can you be a person (fang ke weiren)" [Song 3-5].

The close connection between personhood and bodily comportment has not disappeared during the Republic. Recall the comment of the woman who learnt the true meaning of reading only after applying it to her bodily conduct. But this is not how Mrs. Chen uses lishen. Personhood for her is dependent upon material independence. According to her, the best means of lishen is to set up a livelihood of one's own (liye). Now that Manzhouguo has entered the era of Datong or the Great Unity, Mrs. Chen avers, women have plenty of opportunity to make a livelihood. Once they

have set up a living, they can then devote themselves to the task of purifying the world (huozhe neng sheshen shujie). In this way, because one would not be working for money or fame, one could rid oneself of greed. Was this not the best way to lishen [ORMS 4: 181]?

Several points in this personal narrative deserve attention. First, observe the ease with which the meaning of lishen in one context (home) is transferred to another (society) where it may be subversive of the original context. Crucial to this transfer (and subversiveness) is not simply the valorization of social service, but the corollary notion of financial autonomy. The notion of liye, often treated in these narratives as a subset of lishen, becomes one of the most important concerns of these women as they seek to establish a material base to enable their role as moral citizens of the Society and the world. Second, note the appropriation of the rhetoric of the Manzhouguo state. Many women were purposeful in their use of state rhetoric and tended to seize any rhetorical openings to advance the condition of women. Finally, there is the conflation of service in the outside world and moral purification of this world. It suggests that participation in the social world is subordinated to ethical and religious goals. These goals occupy the space of authenticity and inner meaning for the individual woman, but it is a space that is framed by the new patriarchy of the middle class and the state.

The interweaving of these three elements--appropriation of the rhetoric, carving out a space, role and basis for independent

social action, and the employment of this autonomy to achieve the moral and religious goals of the society--is, adjusting for individual details, a recurring pattern in the women's narratives. Note how grandmother Cai elides over her unfiliality in an era when universal education has become an unquestioned value. At the age of thirty-three, grandmother Cai confesses, she defied the wishes of the elders and went off to study. Now she is a grandmother and it is her responsibility to devote herself (jinxin) to the education of her children and grandchildren. She closes with the comment that she is a vegetarian, is deeply religious and has tried to rid herself of vain desires. Here the value of women's education in wider society, in the modernist rhetoric of the Manzhouguo state, as well as in strains within the Morality Society, allows her to justify an earlier act of unfilial behaviour. She finesses filiality, however, not only with the superior card of universal education, but also with the end-play of devotion to spiritual virtues [ORMS 137].

The strategy, if it can be called so, is to detach oneself from one kind of pedagogical value but continue to derive meaning from the constitutive representation by emphasizing another of its qualities or values. Thus while grandmother Cai concluded her game leaving the antagonist with the finessed filial card in his hands, Mrs. Li, like several others, uses filiality to trump unquestioned obedience to her husband. Ever since she heard a leader of the society care for his own mother, Mrs. Li determined to set up her own source of livelihood (liye) to care for her

ailing mother. Since she had to go out of the home, her husband yelled at her and accused her of being unfaithful. She says that she has never loved any man other than her husband. But now her loving heart has set [ORMS 4:140]. Mrs. Sun has had to care for her sick father and student brother. Her husband has had problems at work and cannot provide for all of them. She has been inspired by these wise words of the leaders (shanren): "In devoting herself, the woman must not weary the husband; rather she should be able to help the husband obtain virtue", to set up an independent means of livelihood [ORMS 4:139] .¹⁷

The ideal of moral autonomy within lishen is sometimes interpreted in such a radical way that it subverts the very basis of the pedagogy: family values. Thus one Ms. Liu declares that her understanding of lishen includes the philosophy of single living--the merits of remaining unmarried (dushen zhuyi sixiang) [ORMS 4:188]. We also see a kind of feminist filiality overcoming patriarchy. A Mrs. Liu recalls that her mother was ordered back to her natal home. She and her brother were not permitted to visit her. Later she and her brother devoted themselves to restoring the family and she established a source of livelihood for her mother [ORMS 4:132]. This woman goes on to challenge the sages. She says, "The sages ask us to follow the three male

¹⁷ A Mrs. Zhu recalled being so driven by anxiety when her stepmother arrived after her mother died, that she wore out fifteen pairs of shoes. Later she realized that her stepmother was not unkind and she herself had been unfilial. So in order to make up, she set up a business together with her and her selfish feelings have dissolved [ORMS 4:130].

figures (sancong) and learn from our husbands. We listen to our husbands, but they do not hear us. My husband eats meat and is not very virtuous, whereas I have only eaten meat once and I am a filial daughter-in-law. Should I not be the one from whom he should learn the Way? But he has been formed early and I am incapable of helping him. Anyway I am not much concerned about my marriage [ORMS 4:231]." Note, however, even in this last episode, the filial link to the mother appears to be the driving sentiment for Mrs. Liu.

Perhaps the episode which best reveals the inseparability of the search for autonomy and commitment to the moral values of the Society is narrated by the same Mrs. Chen who urged women to take advantage of the job opportunities for them in Manzhouguo. "I was once sent to Beijing to lecture, but my husband followed me and insisted that I return home. Why is it that men can bully women so? I asked the teacher (shanren) if I should return. He replied, 'You may return. What do you have to fear? All you have to know is whether or not you have the will'. I returned. In Tianjin I was asked whether I returned of my own will. I nearly wept. I had resolved to return because I remembered that I could not violate my parents' will (ming). The next time I left, I went away for four years. And so I am what I am today. The important thing is to know your own will (zhi). It is how and why people make up their minds that is important, not the decision itself. I believe it is important to be filial... When you have an independent income you are not only, as the teacher says, the

iron master (tie caizhu), you become the golden master (jin caizhu)" [ORMS 4:181-182].

I want to dwell on this moving and complex narrative not because of the way in which these women have grasped the importance of outside service and financial independence, or because of the continued importance of filiality. Rather I am struck by the thought that the source of strength and resolve for this woman derives precisely from the very ideology which constrains her in so many other ways. It is by knowing her mind and cultivating her resolve (lizhi) that she is able to establish her independence from her husband despite the constraints. The segment in the records of the proceedings of the conference that is most restricting for women is the one titled zhizhi, to know the limits. The doctrine that is invoked most often as a constraint, and indeed, as self-constraint, is that of the three obediences or sancong. When faced by such constraints one as strong and gifted as Mrs. Chen can still pick her way around them, but that is not necessarily true for many other women. Mrs. Chen acknowledges the importance of these obediences but she does not dwell upon them at length. From our fathers, she says, we can know our nature, from our husbands our fate, and through our sons we can establish ourselves (lishen). She does not elaborate upon what she means by lishen here, but moves immediately to the differences in the ways in which her parents were "good people" and the way she can be a morally pure person. Her parents were good people of a village or county; she is a good citizen of the

entire nation, and indeed, the world [ORMS 4:227-228]. Once again she invokes the expanded community of moral service to elude these constraints.

But not all the women were as skilful as Mrs. Chen. Mrs. Zhao says that her greatest aspiration is to be a man, so much so that she sometimes forgets that she is a woman. But her nature is that of a woman, her mind is that of a woman and her body is that of a woman. She needs to remind herself constantly about these constraints [ORMS 4:219]. Another woman cites the sages to acknowledge to herself that a woman must recognize her limits in her duty to observe the three obediences [ORMS 4:220]. Mrs. Liu believes that because she has a woman's heart, she was not filial to her in-laws and did not obey her husband (congfu). Thus they brought in a "sister" into the household. Now she has tried to be a good wife and obeys her husband dutifully. Although they are poor, they are pure inside [ORMS 4:236].

I have cited the constraints at the end in order to remind myself of the limits of interpretation, to acknowledge the extent to which the pedagogy did shape the subject. Yet I have been amazed by the degree to which the enunciating subject was able to construct a sphere of autonomous activity. To be sure, there were divisions of opinion among the men of the Morality Society itself that gifted women were able to exploit. But I would like to propose that discourses and representations which constitute the reality of the individual are unable to prevent the irruption of elements from alternative or ambient discourses into their

language, in this case the irruption of elements from the discourse of the modern woman. This transformation is often disguised by the continued usage of an older language which has come to signify a different, newer meaning (a process fashionably known as metalepsy), as with the transformation of lishen and liye which accompanied the emergence of the social realm.

Discursive irruption into the interior space of authenticity from alternative discourses did not occur only among conservative or traditional-izing societies. While the May 4th view of the nation had little place for the tropes of the past, there was a discursive split in its imagery of woman. In the wartime writings and propaganda of many May 4th activists, the nation was depicted in the historical figure of a chaste woman raped by an aggressor--an irruption of both past and contemporary, conservative representations of woman and nation into its interior space of authenticity.¹⁸

At the same time, the women's enunciation of the rhetoric of the Morality Society should not be mistaken as purely instrumental manipulation. These women were not one-dimensional rational actors who manipulated language to maximize their utility. Some recent critiques of the idea of hegemony come dangerously close to such a position. James Scott's interesting work on subaltern groups who pay lip service to or use the

¹⁸ Surely there is a link between this discursive split and the CCP representation of woman's purity described by Meng Yue above.

"hegemonic" ideology to pursue practices from a hidden transcript suggests a flexible view of ideology which is welcome, but its instrumentality is overdrawn. The women lecturers of the Morality Society were people who maneuvered the language in the same moment as they were constituted by it. The moral and spiritual goals that pervaded the space of authenticity enabled a defiance of pedagogy even while they limited the behaviour and identities of these women. In this way, the inviolability of the authentic space itself was not affected. It remained unchallenged and continued to both inspire and constrain subjects. But its meaning was changed.

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